

Role-Play Exercise: TastEE Foods

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1. Print copies of the role-play exercise pages (one copy of "Background" for each

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TastEE Foods is a canned food manufacturer founded in 1982. Its original product line consisted of canned vegetables that now account for 47 percent of its revenue. In 2000 the company diversified into canned fruit, which now accounts for 43 percent of their sales. The remaining 10 percent consists of baby food, a recent product line adopted only four years ago. However, the baby line seems to be the most successful. Although it has only been introduced in the northwest area, it has captured nearly 25 percent of the market. TastEE promotes the fact that it uses only the freshest organic ingredients to create its baby food. Due to efficiencies of scale, the company has been able to offer its baby food line at a lower price than most competitors in the organic baby

media informs them that the factory responsible had faulty equipment and blames Trent. They are demanding that he be fired. The CEO has set up a meeting tomorrow with the Vice President of Operations, the Vice President of Quality Control, the Manager of Communications, and the Manager of Human Resources to discuss damage control and put together an action plan for what to do next. It also needs to consider what it should do with their star plant manager Trent.

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You are the CEO of TastEE Foods and have been with the company for more than 15 years. You have high expectations for the company and do not like to tolerate performance that is anything less than superior. However, you have the reputation of being tough but fair. That is why when the New Haven factory began experiencing less-than-adequate performance, you gave them some additional time to clean up their act. When Trent became plant manager of the New Haven plant and completely turned it around, you were amazed. At first, you wondered about his methods, but you decided that he is simply a talented manager who has particular skills in turning around struggling plants.

You are highly dismayed at the negative publicity the company is getting and hate to think that a product coming from your company made babies sick. You are glad there are no fatalities, but you know that nonetheless, this could devastate the baby food business for the firm.

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You have worked for several different food companies in quality control, training, and operations for the past 17 years. TastEE hired you from Nestlé six years ago. Having begun your career at the manufacturing level, you have a good working relationship with the plant managers, especially with plant manager Trent. In fact, you were influential in hiring him to turn around the New Haven plant. You did not tell the hiring committee that you and Trent had actually dated quite seriously while you were in college because you did not think it was relevant. You do not feel that it constitutes a conflict of interest. You knew Trent had amazing managerial skills and was more than qualified for the job. It had nothing to do with your past relationship. However, you think it would be best if others were not made aware of it.

One thing that has made you uncomfortable since you started here is the decentralized structure of the different plants. While you think a decentralized structure has its place in certain occupations, you feel that a factory environment requires a much more centralized structure. You were not pleased when you discovered that each plant manager had their own type of quality control and training. Most of them seem to have appropriate controls in place, but you discovered that the plant in Lexington had eliminated formal quality control audits and substituted sporadic questionnaires filed by the plant managers.

Although you reported this to management, the issue has not been resolved. The Vice President of Operations seemed to adopt a nonchalant attitude toward the news, and you believe that all he cares about is productivity. You also feel uncomfortable around the Vice President of Operations due to some remarks he made about your good looks, but you don't think these qualify as harassment.

You were happy to learn that Trent had hired a seasoned quality control manager for the New Haven factory and had all the recommended processes and procedures in place. This is why you are so surprised when you hear that contamination has occurred at the factory. You are certain that Trent had no knowledge of the faulty machinery and wonder if the quality control manager for the plant had slipped up somewhere. However, from what you have heard, the CEO is incredibly angry with Trent and blames him for the problem. According to rumors, he is looking for the best way to fire him. You are certain he is innocent and do not want him to lose his job. You are especially nervous because you were the one who advocated for his hire.

Even worse, the Vice President of Operations stopped by yesterday and hinted about a relationship you are having or were having with Trent. You worry about whether he will inform the CEO at the upcoming meeting among the top managers.

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You have worked for TastEE for 20 years and have been proud to see your company come so far. You are incredibly loyal to the firm and want nothing to get in the way of productivity. You haven't had a vacation in years, much to your family's chagrin. You are considering taking early retirement, but you think you'd miss the thrill of working too much.

You especially enjoy working with the Vice President of Quality Control, Kayla. The more you spend time working alongside her, the more you are turned off by her seriousness and her belief that quality control trumps all other business functions. You especially dislike how she treats your role in the company. It's clear she thinks you do not contribute much

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You have worked at this job for the past five years and are well-liked. In fact, you passed up jobs at other places so you could continue working here. You always strive to do your best for the employees. You view yourself as a buffer, ensuring that employee rights are respected and they are treated fairly.

Like the other managers, you are surprised and shocked about the contamination scandal. Although you did not hire Trent, you heard a lot about him and didn't think he would be the type of person to ignore a problem because it might halt production temporarily. You wonder if perhaps there is more going on at the New Haven plant than meets the eye. Employees seemed happy there, but what if they just acted that way to keep from being retaliated against? You decide to check records of complaints received through the hotline for the past year. Very few employee complaints have been about the New Haven plant.

A few weeks ago, the CEO burst into your office and wanted to know how he could go about firing Trent. The CEO is certain that Trent knew about the malfunctioning machine. However, you know the investigation has not proved that Trent had any knowledge that the machine was malfunctioning. You try to explain to the CEO that he would have to wait until the investigation into the contamination scandal was completed.

But the CEO didn't seem to care. He wanted to fire Trent outright with no severance package. Again, you claim that you cannot just fire him with no proof, and as the severance package was part of his contract upon hire, the company would have to prove he was willfully negligent to avoid paying the severance package. You also inform the CEO that more and more employees today are filing—and sometimes winning—lawsuits for unfair termination of employment. However, the CEO did not want to hear any of it. You hope the meeting tomorrow to address what should be done will go more smoothly.